



POLITICS OF THE REPEAL OF THE CHINESE EXCLUSION LAWS

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and the latter, a journalist in Chinatown for over four decades. In an article published in the *Survey Graphic*, a widely circulated national magazine, not long after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Rose Hum Lee enthusiastically reported the phenomenal gains being made by Chinese Americans in occupational categories from which they were previously excluded for reason of race, and optimistically concluded that the Pearl Harbor crisis was a blessing in disguise for Chinese Americans because they were well on the way “toward complete assimilation.” Inhibiting this inevitable process, according to her, was the fact that Chinese immigrants in the United States were still ineligible to become citizens through naturalization as those who came from “other lands.” She wrote:

Every thinking Chinese in this country and in China hopes that the American people would advance the social, political, and economic status of the Chinese in the United States. To be fighting for freedom and democracy in the Far East, at a cost of 7 million lives in five years of hard long bitter warfare, and to be denied equal opportunity in the greatest of democracies, seems the Height of irony.

Fifty years ago, during the height of World War II, the U.S. Congress voted to repeal the fifteen anti-Chinese laws enacted between 1882 and 1913 as a gesture of goodwill to “our” Chinese allies fighting against Japanese militarism and imperialism in China. President Franklin D. Roosevelt hailed the passage of the repeal legislation as “a manifestation on the part of the American people of their affection and regard [toward the Chinese people].”

To understand precisely how the Chinese in the United States perceived these laws and the legislative process leading to their repeal, we need to hear the voices of at least two of the keenest observers of Chinese America: Rose Hum Lee and Gilbert Woo. The former was a prolific Chinese American sociologist



In essence, she wanted Chinese immigrants to be granted citizenship, but she made no reference to the discriminatory immigration laws against the Chinese. Appealing to the American public conscience, she wrote, “It is up to the American people to effect the emancipation by law.”

Recalling the campaign to repeal the Exclusion laws, Gilbert Woo, the late publisher and editor of the *Chinese Pacific Weekly* (*Taiping yang zhoubao*), made this observation in his weekly recollection column shortly before he died in 1979: “As far as I can remember, the campaign was not initiated by the Chinese community, neither was it pushed by the community. Our attitude was as if we were *just outside observers*.”

As we now reflect upon the remarks by these two Chinese American observers, we cannot help but wonder why Rose Hum Lee pleaded only for citizenship, and not for the repeal of the laws excluding Chinese from immigration and why she equated citizenship with assimilation, her life-long personal as well as intellectual obsession. Likewise, we cannot help but wonder also why Chinese Americans did not initiate and participate in the campaign to repeal the fifteen exclusionary laws directed against them. Instead, they, like Rose Hum Lee, chose to be “just outside observers.” Is it possible that Chinese Americans simply did not care about the discriminatory laws and the denial of citizenship? Did the repeal accomplish what President Roosevelt and most of the supporters of the repeal claimed? Did it result in equity and fairness in our immigration laws? Did the repeal liberate Chinese Americans from exclusion and racial oppression? If not, what prompted the repeal

movement and the exclusion of Chinese American involvement in the repeal process? In short, how do we assess the repeal that occurred fifty years ago?

It is the intent of the paper to address these questions in the context of the politics of race and of international relations during World War II. The paper begins with a brief outline of the historical process leading to the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion laws. An analysis, including what it meant for Chinese Americans, of the repeal legislation itself follows. I then examine the national and international contexts of the politics of race in the repeal process and why Chinese Americans were systematically kept out of the legislative process. The paper concludes with an analysis of the political consequences of the lobbying efforts on the emergence of the “China Lobby” after the war and of the stereotypical image of Chinese Americans fabricated by the lobby during the repeal drive.

REPEAL OF THE CHINESE EXCLUSION LAWS

Before the advent of the Chinese American era in late 1960s, Chinese Americans can be said to have been living under a structure of dual domination. On the one hand they were racially and legally singled out for exclusion and discrimination. On the other hand, they were also subject to the extraterritorial domination of the Nationalist government, led by Chiang Kai-shek and his Guomintang (Kuomintang) party.

The domination of these two external forces was total, extending into political, economic, and cultural spheres. For example, Chinese



Americans were systematically excluded from the basic rights and protection guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution. Chinese Americans were effectively relegated to a rigidly defined apartheid system under which their rights, privileges, and sanctuaries in the white society were effectively suspended. It was an apartheid established by democratic means and sustained by repeated judicial decisions.

Confined to Chinatowns in towns and cities, Chinese Americans also came under the extraterritorial domination of China, its government and culture, with the consent of the U.S. government. Key institutions, such as schools and newspapers, were controlled by the government. Key social and cultural institutions were replicas of China. Political loyalty to the government in China, then headed by Chiang Kai-shek, was expected. In effect, colonial relations existed between Chinatowns and China.

The United States had little or no interest in advancing the rights and welfare of Chinese Americans and China was too weak to protect the rights of Chinese in the United States. Decisions affecting Chinese American lives were made without their knowledge or consent. The mutual interest of the two countries was to use them as pawns to advance their respective national interests determined frequently by their bilateral relations and domestic politics. In particular, the changing diplomatic relations between the two countries had “a direct impact on the status and conditions of Chinese America. This paper will demonstrate how the two oppressive forces exploited the repeal politics and reinforced their domination of Chinese America.

The Chinese Exclusion laws and their repeal must be seen within the structure of dual domination. Between 1882 and 1913, the U.S. Congress enacted fifteen anti-Chinese laws designed to exclude and if possible, exterminate the Chinese from the United States. As if these were not enough, the Congress enacted the National Origins Quota Act of 1924 which rendered the alien Chinese wife of an American citizen inadmissible into the United States and provided wholesale exclusion of all Asians. At the time when this inhumane and exclusionary law was added, W.W. Husband, Commissioner General of Immigration, appropriately declared that the new law made the various Chinese Exclusion laws superfluous and, accordingly, recommended their repeal back in 1924, making him the first in the United States to call formally for their repeal. However, his call was not heeded and no further consideration was given until 1943.

The push to repeal the Exclusion laws, therefore, could not have come from the disenfranchised Chinese American community. Instead, it was initiated in May 1943 and managed exclusively by an ad hoc Citizens’ Committee to Repeal Chinese Exclusion, made up of elite China interest groups, such business, missionaries, old China hands, and career diplomats. The Chiang Kai-shek government preoccupied with its own interest in U.S. financial and military aids, gave its tacit and passive support. From the beginning to the end, Chinese American interests were ignored and Chinese Americans were deliberately kept out of the entire political process.

According to Fred Riggs, who has done the definitive work on the repeal process, two persons were instrumental in initiating the



repeal process in 1943: Donald Dunham, a diplomat stationed in Hong Kong, and Charles Nelson Spinks, an authority on East Asia. Their main reasons were 1) as allies and fellow human beings the Chinese deserved “racial equality” and 2) the future of the United States depended more than ever on its relations with the Asian races against whom existing laws and policies were directed. Thus from the very beginning, it was the national interests of the United States, as defined by the elites, not the interests of Chinese Americans, that motivated the drive to repeal.

Their efforts led to a rapid convergence of interest groups in American politics: the old China hands (Owen Lattimore, Bruno Lasker, Carl Glick, Pearl S. Buck), the corporate China traders, the missionaries to China, diplomats, and the media, most notably Henry Luce. They were quietly supported by representatives and agents of the Chiang Kai-shek, such as C.L. Hsia and Lin Yu-tang. They organized the Citizens’ Committee to Repeal Chinese Exclusion and used it to launch a national campaign. In all, over 250 representing more than forty states joined the committee. How the committee interest groups worked swiftly and to repeal the exclusion laws in 1943 can be found in Riggs’ *Pressures on Congress*, published in 1950.

The Committee’s stated objectives were 1) repeal of the Chinese Exclusion acts, 2) a quota basis for the Chinese, and 3) eligibility of Chinese for naturalization. In other words, narrowly defined: to repeal the Exclusion laws, but to still keep the Chinese immigrants excluded through a tiny annual quota. Fighting racism was never the intent of the committee. In fact, racism was alive and well,

even among the liberals and friends of the Chinese. This explains, as we shall see later, why Chinese Americans were excluded from the process. Even if Chinese Americans were to bring their concerns directly into the legislative process, they were to be ignored.

The Committee further made three strategic decisions. The first, echoing China expert Owen Lattimore, was to concentrate on Chinese exclusion repeal rather than elimination of the ban against all Asian immigration. The basis for this decision was the conviction that “because of our present close ties with China it might be possible to put through the repeal of Chinese exclusion, whereas an attempt to repeal all oriental exclusion laws would almost surely at that time end in defeat.” The second was to reject all the bills previously introduced and to stress the three objectives of the committee in every way and through every channel possible. The third policy was to limit membership of the committee to U.S. citizens, not to discourage Chinese from working for repeal but “to impress Congress with the fact that Americans were demanding the repeal of the antiquated exclusion laws.” The decision to minimize Chinese presence was both deliberate and strategic. The impact of the repeal on Chinese America, as we shall see later, was negligible, if not insulting. In short, both the committee and the U. S. government knew that the proposed legislation would have absolutely no impact on the well-being of Chinese Americans and that the United States stood to score a major propaganda victory.

On October 7, the Dirksen Committee submitted a favorable report on HR 3070, clearing the way for final approval by the House.



To make sure that Congress was fully appraised of the significance of the bill on the U.S. war effort in Asia and international relations, President Roosevelt sent a special message to Congress on October 11 declaring,

I regard this legislation as important in the cause of winning the war and of establishing a secure peace. China is our ally. For many long years she stood alone in the fight against aggressions: Today we fight at her side. She has continued her gallant struggles against very great odds...but China's resistance does not depend alone on guns and planes and on attacks on land and on sea and from the air. It is based as much in the spirit of her people and her faith in her allies. We owe it to the Chinese to strengthen that faith. One step in this direction is to wipe from the statute books those anachronisms in our law which forbid the immigration of Chinese people into this country and which bar Chinese residents from American citizenship.

Nations, like individuals, make mistakes. We must be big enough to acknowledge our mistakes of the past and to correct them.

By the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Laws, we can correct a historic mistake and silence the distorted Japanese propaganda. The enactment of legislation now pending before the Congress would put the Chinese immigrants on a parity with those from other countries. The Chinese

quota would therefore, be only about one hundred immigrants a year. There can be no reasonable apprehension that any such number of immigrants will cause unemployment or provide competition in the search for jobs.

The extension of privileges of citizenship to the relatively few Chinese residents in our country would operate as another meaningful display of friendship. It would additional proof that we regard China not only as a partner in waging war but that we shall regard her as a partner in the days of peace. While it would give the Chinese a preferred status over certain other oriental people, their great contribution to the cause of decency and freedom entitles them to such preference. I am confident that Congress is in full agreement that these measures-long overdue should be taken to correct an injustice to our friends. Action by the Congress now will be in angst of our purpose to apply the policy of the good neighbor to our relations with other peoples.

In no uncertain language, President Roosevelt assured the Congress that the passage of the bill would not precipitate a deluge of Chinese immigrants.

On October 21, the House of Representatives passed HR 3070. This was followed by a favorable report on the same bill by the Senate Judiciary Committee on November 16 (Senate Report No. 535) and passed by the full Senate on November 26. President Roosevelt promptly signed the bill into law and declared,



It is with particular pride and pleasure that I have today signed the bill repealing the Chinese Exclusion Laws. The Chinese people, I am sure, will take pleasure in knowing that this represents a manifestation on the part of the American people of their affection and regard. An unfortunate barrier between allies has been removed. The war effort in the Far East can now be carried on with a greater vigor and a larger understanding of our common purpose.

But there was neither pleasure nor celebration in Chinatowns and, as Gilbert Woo rightly observed, Chinese Americans were “just outside observers” in the entire process.

On February 9, 1944, pursuant to the legislation, Presidential Proclamation 2603 fixed the Chinese quota at 105 per year (58 Stat. 1125). As expected, the new law did not bring any more Chinese immigrants into the United States; nor did it help many to become citizens.

MEANINGS OF THE ACT OF DECEMBER 17, 1943

The law, as enacted by Congress, consisted of three major concerns pushed by the Citizens’ Committee: repealing of the laws relating to the exclusion or deportation of persons of the Chinese race, placing Chinese persons entering the United States annually as immigrants on a fixed 105 quota computed under the provisions of Section 11 of the Immigration Act of 1924, and making persons of the Chinese race eligible to become naturalized U.S. citizens.

The second provision of the Act set forth a legal formula for limiting the number of Chinese admissible into the United States each year. The annual quota was to be computed under the provisions of Section 11 of the Quota Act of 1924, which turned out to be 105 a year. According to the 1924 law, a quota of 100 per annum was allocated to China but only to those persons of races eligible to citizenship born in China, because, under the law, Chinese not eligible for citizenship were prohibited from coming to the United States.

Thus, two separate quotas, for China and the Chinese race, were established as a result of the 1943 law. This rendered the Chinese quota to be the only one not based on nativity. Presumably for this reason it provided a preference up to 75 percent of the Chinese quota for those born and residing in China, so that the Chinese temporarily in the United States or in any other countries in the world would have the opportunity of using up the entire quota of 105 without giving Chinese persons born and residing in China an opportunity to take advantage of the quota. Furthermore, children of Chinese mixed marriages were to be considered legally Chinese regardless of their place of birth. However, there was no provision for the non-quota immigration of alien Chinese wives of American citizens. According to the 1924 law, alien Chinese wives of U.S. citizens were inadmissible because they were aliens ineligible for citizenship even though Section 4(a) of the Act rendered alien wives of U.S. citizens admissible as non-quota immigrants. No provision for Chinese wives of U.S. citizens was enacted until the Act of June 13, 1930. Even then, admission was extended to



only those alien Chinese wives of U.S. citizens married before May 26, 1924. No admission was allowed at all for alien Chinese husbands of U.S. citizens nor for alien Chinese wives of U.S. citizens married between 1925 and 1930. Ironically, before May 24, 1934, a Chinese child born abroad of a father who was a U.S. citizen acquired U.S. citizenship at birth if the father had resided in the United States prior to the birth and thus was eligible for admission. A Chinese child of a U.S. citizen born abroad after May 24, 1934, was a citizen if the U.S. citizen father had resided in the United States ten years prior to his or her birth. This meant that under the 1943 law, alien Chinese wives or husbands of U.S. citizens had to compete with all other Chinese immigrant applicants for the 105 quota each year, as nearly ten thousand Chinese American GIs found out to their distress and outrage after the war when they tried to bring their wives into the country for which they were willing to die.

Such built-in injustice and inhumanity of the repeal law was, in fact, brought to the attention of the Dirksen Committee on October 10, 1943, in a letter sent by a white American who had just married a Chinese woman overseas. He wrote, “I fell in love and I married a Chinese girl who I cannot bring to the United States because of her ancestry, something I found out after I married.” Riggs, who studied the repeal process, thought the failure to include Chinese spouses of U.S. citizens under non-quota immigration was “due primarily to a technicality of drafting.” He also pointed out that the Citizens’ Committee was apparently unaware of this hiatus in the proposed legislation until October. Last-minute attempts to amend the bill were met with stiff

opposition from strong proponents of the bill. The bill was therefore passed with no relief for Chinese spouses of U.S. citizens. A provision for the spouses had to be enacted on the unanimous consent calendar in 1946 to allow Chinese American GIs to bring in their Chinese wives.

The third provision of the legislation deals with citizenship through naturalization. Prior to this law, only white persons or persons of African-Black race or persons of races indigenous to the Western Hemisphere were racially eligible for naturalization. According to the Immigration Committee report on HR 3070, the number of Chinese who would actually be made eligible for naturalization was “negligible”—approximately 45,000 alien Chinese in the United States. The Committee further clarified this figure by saying,

...a large number of these Chinese have never been admitted to the U.S. for lawful permanent residence, which is a condition precedent to naturalization and, therefore, many of this number would not be eligible for naturalization, not because of racial disability, but because they cannot meet existing statutory requirements of law. The number of Chinese who will be made eligible in the future, in addition to those already here, will of necessity be very small because the quota for China is limited to 105 per annum, as provided for in Section 2 of this bill.

In light of the above analysis of the content of the 1943 law, it is fitting to conclude this section by quoting the closing remarks of the



House on Immigration Committee. One cannot help but be struck by the wide gap between the eloquent egalitarian rhetoric of the Committee and the condescending and cruel reality of equality facing the Chinese in the United States and China under this law.

The original act of exclusion (against the Chinese) was not born of ill will towards the Chinese people. The motivation was exclusively economic. But profound changes have taken place in sixty years.

We have time on abandoned occasion to reflect on the extraordinary qualities of the Chinese people. Above all, the tenacity and courage of the Chinese in their terrible ordeal of the last 70 years has impelled a respect that we are proud to acknowledge.

It is clear today that only a few short years stand between the Chinese people and the full use of their vast resources, both human and material, for their own betterment and well-being, free from any outside control. It has always been the policy of the United States to help China in her struggle against encroachment upon her independence and sovereignty and we are now brothers in arms in that cause. It is fitting, therefore, that the incongruity of discriminatory legislation, inconsistent with the dignity of both our peoples, should be eliminated.

In reporting favorably on a bill for the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Acts,

this Committee is expressing what it believes to be the will of the American people. It is expressing, also, the realization of the American people that freedom depends upon the respect for the integrity of others and that their own freedom and security demand that they accord the others the respect that they ask for themselves.

A cruel hoax was perpetrated against all Chinese Americans by a group of well-meaning white liberal elites! The 105 quota was an insult to all Chinese Americans. The debate over the 105 quota in 1943, in fact, prompted Gilbert Woo, then a reporter for the Chinese Times, to write, on September 7, a caustic satire on how weak the Caucasian race must be if 105 Chinese a year can lower the living standards of millions of Americans or contaminate the purity of the Caucasian race. Chinese Americans must remain excluded by laws until 1965 when the racist quota system was finally abolished.

POLITICS OF RACE IN THE REPEAL PROCESS

From the preceding discussion on the process and the substance of the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion laws, it is clear that the advocates and the supporters of HR 3070 and its variant versions did not have the interests and welfare of Chinese in the United States at heart. Race was central to the debate and to the entire repeal legislative process. The lofty ideals of racial equality and justice for the Chinese so eloquently articulated by the president and by leaders of our social, political, religious, business, and labor organizations, could not be further removed from the desire



of social, political, and economic advancement and hope of complete assimilation of the Chinese in the United States expressed by Rose Hum Lee in her 1942 article. The national agenda was not restoring the civil rights of Chinese Americans but advancing American national interests. The primary U.S. interest was the use of the Chinese in China to win the war, to boost the morale of the Chinese soldiers fighting the Japanese in China, and to create the appropriate international setting for global hegemony for the United States after the war. This meant that the United States had to prevent Chiang Kai-shek and his soldiers from defecting to the Japanese side by means not costly to the United States and ignore what must be regarded as an irritant: justice and equality for the “negligible” Chinese in the United States.

A further illustration of such indifferent attitudes toward the human rights of the Chinese in America was the deliberate exclusion of Chinese Americans in the legislative formulation and lobbying activities and in the unwillingness of the Citizens’ Committee and Congressional advocates to rectify the blatant injustice inflicted upon the Chinese spouses of American citizens in the pending legislation on grounds of political expediency.

A quick analysis of the long statements of President Roosevelt, spokesmen for the Department of Justice and State, Congressional leaders, and the members of the Citizens’ Committee will reveal that the repeal had an international political objective and a national political imperative. Every supporter spoke of the importance of this legislation vis-à-vis U.S. relations with China

and how its passage would not “cause unemployment or competition in the search for jobs” in the United States, as President Roosevelt put it in his special message to Congress. Our first task is to examine the international and national context of the bill. We will then identify the roles played by the various interest groups, which collectively became the renowned China Lobby in the post-war era. Throughout the process, as we shall see, race was the central issue.

The major arguments advanced in favor of repeal were 1) racial equality and human rights, 2) justice to our Chinese allies, 3) fairness to Chinese Americans, 4) aid to future commercial relations with China, and 5) to help win the war. Congressional hearings, transcripts of Congressional floor debates, articles in newspapers and magazines, support letters and campaign pamphlets, public announcements and briefing papers demonstrated beyond doubt the importance of the fifth argument. When President Roosevelt told Congress, “I regard this legislation as important in the cause of winning the war and of establishing a secure peace,” he was reflecting the international and military objectives of the United States. Expressing similar ideas, but from a different perspective, the House Immigration Committee reported, “The tenacity and courage of the Chinese in their terrible ordeal of the last 70 years has impelled a respect that we are proud to acknowledge.”

Moreover, in light of the constant propaganda bombardment of the Japanese against the Chinese—pointing to the United States’ discrimination against the Chinese and urging Asia for Asians—the argument went directly



to the heart of the problem, that is, the United States could not afford to have the remaining Chinese soldiers, then bearing virtually the full burden of the war in East Asia, defect to the Japanese side. Already Wang Jing-Wei had gone over to the Japanese “Sphere of Far Eastern Co-prosperity” and obtained a nominal sovereignty at Nanjing directly under Japanese supervision, not to mention puppet “Last Emperor” of the Manzhouguo set up by the Japanese since 1932, the Japanese-sponsored Federal Government of Mongolia in Eastern Mongolia run by Prince De (a descendant of Genghis Khan) since 1937, and the Beijing government created by the Japanese invaders.

Besides, Chiang Kai-shek had repeatedly threatened an imminent “collapse” of his army and government and his desire to strike a compromise with Japan if American aids, military and financial, were not forthcoming. Knowing that the United States needed him to eventually defeat Japan, he was blackmailing Roosevelt. Congressman Walter Judd said, “We cannot win this war alone in the Pacific or at least without almost prohibitive costs. We can succeed only if our allies and particularly Chinese can hold against Japan until we can defeat Germany and set our full strength in the Pacific.” Boosting Chinese morale, counteracting Japanese propaganda, and tying down extensive Japanese military personnel and resources in the China theater were the primary reasons behind this foremost argument for repeal. Riggs appropriately labeled this argument as “a decisive factor” in obtaining the acceptance of certain congressmen. He said, “The war argument was a great strategic value in weakening the opposition and winning at least acceptance if not

support from pressure groups and Congressmen who might otherwise have rejected the proposal.”

The second important and recurring argument in favor of repeal concerned the potential Chinese market for U.S. products in the post-war period. As Mansfield Freeman, President of the U.S. Life Insurance Company, testified before the House Immigration Committee:

Trade with China and cooperation with her 400 million people are going to be very important factors in America’s post-war prosperity. There is no nation which has such potential opportunities in the Far East for the U.S. Why should we limit those opportunities by keeping on our statute books legislation which no longer is serving any very useful purpose, and yet which simply tends to irritate and insult what might be our best friend?

Similarly, Congressman Charles Dewey of Illinois testified that the Chinese and American economies were complementary and that, without the Chinese market, the United States would face “over-production” and resulting unemployment. According to him, repeal would establish the pro-American sentiment in China necessary for sound commercial relations. Echoing Dewey’s point, Congressman Mason of Texas declared, “Our potential trade with China after this war is over should furnish jobs to hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of our boys when they return from the war.” During Congressional floor debates, Congressman Walter Judd put it bluntly by stating, “To prove our intention



to treat China as an equal is not starry-eyed idealism or sentimental generosity. It is good, hard business sense.” In short, avoiding a return of the Great Depression at the end of the war was foremost on the minds of both government and big business. Access to and domination of the postwar China market was crucial to the United States. Granting equality and justice to Chinese Americans, in other words, was the last thing the politicians and military strategists had in mind.

If we were to place the two primary arguments within the broader context of American wartime foreign policy, it would help explain why they were so central to American global strategy. This is the “big picture” or the high stake in international politics. The wartime strategy of the United States was to defeat the Germans first; defeating the Japanese had to come second. According to diplomatic historian Herbert Feis, this American foreign policy was formulated tentatively a year before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor but firmly adopted in the early months of the war, by two policies: the first was to make Europe the area of primacy concentration; the second, to make China a great power. In other words, it was a policy of Europe first and Asia second. To American decision makers, Hitler’s threat to Europe and American interests in Europe was regarded as more serious and far-reaching than the Japanese threat or the war in China and Asia.

Assisting China’s resistance to Japanese aggression was to be given a lower priority. However, slowing down the Japanese expansion and occupation throughout Asia and tying up the Japanese military resources was vital to our national interest. Toward that end,

it was important for President Roosevelt to use China to accomplish that task. The challenge for Roosevelt was how to buy time and prevent Chiang Kai-shek from defecting to the Japanese side. This was why he came up with the policy of propping up China’s power and prestige to a Great Power status and admitting Chiang Kai-shek into the Big Four, ranking him equal to Churchill, Stalin, and Roosevelt, over Churchill’s objection.

This European orientation explains why, on the one hand, President Roosevelt steadfastly refused to imperil vital military situations in Europe by diverting war resources and manpower to China as repeatedly demanded by Chiang Kai-shek. On the other hand, it explains why he had to keep Chiang Kai-shek satisfied with several no-cost, morale-boosting concessions, most notably, 1) signing a treaty with China on January 11, 1943, relinquishing American extraterritorial rights in China, 2) introducing China (over the contemptuous objections of both Britain and Russia) as one of the Big Four at the Cairo and Moscow summit conferences in December 1943, and 3) repealing the Chinese Exclusion laws on December 17 in the same year.

To elevate the sagging Chiang Kai-shek regime in Chongqing to the status of a major world power definitely required a massive infusion of American dollars, men, materials, and equipment, something President Roosevelt refused to deliver. Roosevelt, therefore, needed to give Chiang the three less costly concessions to keep him in line. Giving up extraterritorial rights in Japan-occupied territories in China and according him the prestige of being one of the Big Four



for the price of tying up Japanese war capability was the least President Roosevelt could do. Repealing the Exclusion laws was an important component of this strategy. After all, the United States also needed Chiang Kai-shek to keep the Soviet Union under control after World War II. As Congressman Mike Mansfield of Montana put it during Congressional floor debate on the repeal legislation:

We must realize just how much we need China, not how much China needs us. We must never forget that we will have full need of all our energies, abilities and real friends in our barbaric struggle with Japan. We must not forget our future lies in large part in the Pacific. A friendly and strong China will be a safeguard for us in that area. Let us recognize the situation as it really exists and do our share to keep China growing so that American lives will be spared and the war shortened considerably. Not by words—which means everything and anything—but by action now.

It is only within this international context during the height of the war that we can understand the primary argument, as comical as it may sound, about repealing the Exclusion laws to help our ally to win the war in Asia and the secondary argument concerning a receptive China market for American products after the war. No wonder arguments regarding racial equality, justice, and fairness to the Chinese and Chinese Americans during the debate were appropriately referred to as “plainly boomerangs.”

In spite of these concessions to Chiang Kai-shek together with occasional affordable shipments of limited financial and military aids to China during the war, the policy of artificially propping up the corrupt and deteriorating Chiang regime proved misguided and costly to the United States immediately after the war. The lobby for China relief and for the repeal during the war eventually became the most politically influential lobby, the China Lobby, in Washington, D.C. after the war.

Within the context of domestic racial politics, the major arguments against the repeal were 1) wait till the war was over, 2) open a wedge for further influx of Asian immigrants, 3) protect jobs for American veterans and labor, 4) maintain racial purity or white supremacy, and 5) keep America for Americans. At the heart of these objections was the historic Chinese Question, over which the nation debated for three decades before the enactment of the first Chinese Exclusion law in 1882, and which continued to be the subject of acrimonious debate for another three decades.

Of these arguments, the last two—expressed mostly by witnesses from extreme right-wing organizations such as the United American Mechanics, National Blue Star Mothers, American Coalition of Patriotic Societies, Society of Mayflower Descendants, Daughters of the American Revolution, and Sons and Daughters of Liberty—were regarded as not credible. And, in fact, the Citizens’ Committee expended no energy to neutralize its opposition, and testimonies by these groups were largely ignored by the House Immigration Committee during its hearings. Since there was a wartime urgency tied to the



timing of the proposed legislation, the timeliness argument—a delay tactic—could likewise be refuted without too much difficulty. This left only the second and third arguments for serious consideration, both of which had to do with the limited number of jobs for too many job seekers, especially if there were new immigrants or an impending admission of the Chinese through a quota allocation. These arguments, of course, were charged with racial and political overtones.

Domestic opposition to the repeal came from two major segments of American society: the labor unions and the veterans' organizations. While there was strong conservative opposition to the bill led by Congressman Leonard A. Allen of Louisiana, some of the conservatives were willing to go along with the repeal alone, provided there was no quota for Chinese and no right of naturalization. As Congressman Allen, a member of the House Immigration Committee, declared, "I have indicated to the Committee already that I was willing to go along and erase or repeal the laws which named the Chinese and put the fingers upon them," but he was definitely opposed to wiping out Asian exclusion in general or providing for a quota. Thus the real issue was whether Chinese should be admitted at all after the repeal and, if so, how many. Louis G. Hines, legislative representative of the American Federation of Labor, articulated the AFL position in this manner:

The American Federation of Labor has nothing but admiration for the Chinese people. I do not think that any other group of people in this country has done more to help the Chinese than the American Federation of Labor...

I want to go back to the inception of this thing in the first convention of the American Federation of Labor back in 1881 when it was recognized that something had to be done to stop the immigration of Chinese into this country...the AFL has been maintaining all these years for the exclusion of Asiatics....

We do not think that this is the time to raise this question of letting down the bars. The fact that it has been put forth here by people to represent winning the war, that is all poppycock...we are not opposing this from a racial stand point, we are opposing this from an economic standpoint.

Hines further questioned the annual quota of 105, insisting that arguments would be advanced in the future for raising the quota:

If England with a population of less than 100 million, has a quota of 65,000, China with a population of 400 million, India with a population of 400 million, if those countries should demand and get quotas in line with the population of their countries, we will be bringing in over a million a year.

Similar sentiment was expressed by Homer Chaillaux, director of the National Americanism Commission of the American Legion, S.E. Wilkins of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Victor E. Devereaux, director of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and representatives of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters.



Removed by thousands of miles from battlefronts in Europe and Asia, the racist position of the leadership of the VFW at the height of World War II was completely detached from the Chinese American fighting men under enemy fires. Chinese American enlisted men, 15,000 strong, probably did not know what the leaders of VFW were telling their government in Washington, D.C., and how that organization's view was to have an adverse impact on their rights as citizens when they tried to bring their wives into the United States after the war.

Lester M. Hunt of the Teamsters argued that the repeal was being instigated by the Communists and that Congress was being coerced into passing the bill. He charged that the industrialists who now had to pay living wages wanted to bring in cheap labor, but being too "smart" to say so directly, they called for racial equality—for everyone to live in the same house and use the same toothbrush. The Communists were apparently "suckers" or "nitwits" to fall for this "reactionary propaganda." He advised that if the Communists thought the Chinese were discriminated against, then the solution was not to let them in but to keep everybody out! The irony of this conspiracy theory or Communist conspiracy theory will become self-evident when we discuss the makeup of the China Lobby and its objectives in a later context.

At this point mention must also be made that there was no united opposition within labor movement, nor was there a solid support for the position taken up by the leadership of the national veterans organizations. In particular, the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) was one of the earliest supporters of

repeal. As for the veterans organizations, again, we find internal dissension. From the very inception the organizers of the Citizens' Committee to repeal the Chinese Exclusion laws anticipated the "coolie labor menace" argument of labor unions and veterans organizations. The coolie labor menace was a political code term for race. A compromise formula was therefore fashioned which would limit immigration to only a few Chinese per year at the same time that it granted formal equality and presumably prestige to the Chinese. It was a costly compromise to the racists and another indication of the oppressive conditions under which Chinese Americans had to live. Such a paradoxical position was subsequently incorporated into the organizational objectives of the Citizens' Committee at its very first meeting and the racial basis of assigning the quota was written into the Gosset and Magnuson bills.

While the proponents of HR 3070 vigorously defended its justice and adequacy, the paradox did not escape notice and invited sarcasm from its opposition. During House debate on the bill, Congressman Elmer of Missouri rhetorically asked, "Do you think the Chinese will be fooled by this cheap gesture of international comity?" But according to Riggs, "The adoption of the racial quota of 105 met the main objective of labor organizations, namely, that repeal would bring a flood of cheap labor." Likewise he concluded that, "The racial quota compromise...destroyed the main argument of the organizations—veterans and labor—which feared a heavy influx of workers." Although it may have politically destroyed the opposition, it also buried Chinese American rights and privileges.



CONSEQUENCES OF THE REPEAL

I began this paper by suggesting that Chinese Americans were living under a structure of dual domination: racial oppression and extra-territorial domination of the Chiang Kai-shek government. Both hegemonic forces had very little interest in the welfare and rights of Chinese Americans because they were interested in only the big picture, their respective national interests and their bilateral relations. From the brief analysis above, it is clear that the Chinese American community did not find itself liberated from the structure of dual domination after the passage of the 1943 law. In fact, the events leading to and after the repeal confirmed and reinforced the structure. The rights of Chinese Americans were to be ignored by both the U.S. government and by the Chiang government as each pursued its national objectives.

The Citizens' Committee, Congressional proponents of the bill, and President Roosevelt were interested only in pursuing the U.S. wartime objectives and retaining the racial discrimination against the Chinese. All they wanted was to make some cosmetic changes to meet the strategic needs of the United States and to undermine the Japanese propaganda of anti-Chinese laws in the United States. From the very beginning, they ignored Chinese Americans. Their assessment of domestic political situations led them to strike legislative compromises, to exclude Chinese American participation in the formulation of the bill, and to cause the final passage of a watered-down bill that could only be regarded by Chinese Americans as "an insult to their intelligence," as Congressman Elmer correctly predicted.

The Chiang government cared only about the military and financial aids from the United States and the prospect of having its international status elevated. The racial oppression of Chinese Americans reinforced the extraterritorial domination of Chinese America and insured their loyalty to the regime in China. Throughout the legislative process, the Chiang government could not have cared less about the rights of Chinese Americans and did not speak out forcefully on their behalf. Instead, it conspired with the Citizens' Committee to dictate the political agenda and strategy and followed what it was told to do.

One of the major consequences of the repeal movement was the emergence of a very powerful political force made up of interest groups whose primary concern was the future of China. This group, later identified as the China Lobby, came to play a vital role in post-war domestic and international politics in the United States and in dictating U.S. policy toward China and Taiwan.

Earlier we mentioned the active but behind-the-scene participation of C.L. Hsia, director of the Chinese News Service, and his two advisors, Earl Leaf and H.J. Timberley, in the initial exploratory process of the Citizens' Committee. We also indicated that the Chinese News Service was an important propaganda arm of the Ministry of Information of the Guomindang government in the United States, with offices in New York, San Francisco, Chicago, and Washington, D.C. Hsia contributed support articles in Contemporary China and advised organizers of the Citizens' Committee that it would be unwise for Chinese to figure too conspicuously in the drive-a familiar tactic



used by Guomindang agents in the United States. According to Riggs, in 1942 several Chinese in the United States,

... particularly officers of the Chinese News Service, took active, though unofficial part in studying the possibilities for repeal... when a newsletter was organized (by the Citizens' Committee), it was prepared and circulated by an employee of the Chinese News Service and the mailing list included Chinese News Service personnel, both Chinese and Americans in leading cities, as well as a representative in the Chinese embassy in Washington. In general though, caution was urged and the importance of using Americans to build up opinion on the question was stressed.

In the fall of 1942 a pamphlet entitled "What Chinese Exclusion Really Means;" by Dr. Tso-Chien Shen of the Chinese Ministry for Foreign Affairs, was published by the China Institute in New York, an organization partially supported by the Ministry of Education in China. Riggs reported that Dr. Shen was "substantially stationed in Washington, D.C., at the embassy during the course of the repeal campaign."

When the Citizens' Committee first met on May 25, 1943, a non-member, P.C. Hsu, was reported present, presumably from the Chinese News Service. To help highlight the repeal drive, a Tribute to China sponsored by the United China Relief was held in Carnegie Hall in New York with the aid of a commercial public relations organization. Among the

speakers at a rally were Pearl Buck; Lin Yutang, an apologist of the Guomindang government; Bishop Paul Yu-Pin, on the staff of the *China Monthly* (an influential but apparently independent magazine regarded as "the official mouthpiece of the Chiang government in Chongqing on matters that could not diplomatically be published in the official propaganda organs of that government"); J.B. Powell, a former American correspondent in China and, in 1946, a founder of the American China Policy Association, an organization headed by Alfred Kohlberg devoted to promote aid to China; and Wei Tao-Ming, the Chinese Ambassador to the United States.

Prior to the House Immigration Committee hearings in May and June, Cooper (counsel to the Chinese Embassy) helped to line up witnesses for the hearings but, according to Riggs, "did not speak himself because of his official connections." In addition, the Chinese Embassy played an active but inconspicuous role in lobbying members of the Immigration Committee. For example, on the opening day of the hearings Congressman Allen said, "a gentleman representing himself as coming from the Chinese Embassy has called on me and told me that he was calling on other members of the Committee also." Likewise Congressman Mason said, "The Chinese people, through accredited representatives, have said definitely that this is a very important emergency war measure and authoritative sources from China itself and not from unauthoritative or ill-informed sources." He was probably referring to Madame Chiang Kai-shek who was touring the United States at that time. And, in fact, she invited a number of key Congressmen, among them



Congressmen Mason, Gossett, Magnuson—all sponsors of repeal bills—to a dinner on the weekend of May 15 and 16, ten days before the hearings. Later during the House debate, Mason acknowledged the Magnuson bill was exactly what the Chinese leaders had asked for and wanted.

After HR 3070 was cleared by the House and headed for the Senate, the Citizens' Committee decided that public expression of appreciation by the Chinese government would help speed up the bills through the U.S. Senate. Dutifully, C.L. Hsia of the Chinese News Service was asked to telegraph Hollington K. Tong, Chinese Vice Minister of Information, to get a roundup of reactions in Chongqing which could then be published through the Chinese News Service and used in Congressional debates. This immediately resulted in glowing, appreciative public statements from such government spokesmen as Sun Fu, president of the Legislative Yuan; Sao-Ke Alfred Sze, former ambassador to the United States; and newspaper editorials. None mentioned how Chinese were to be excluded still. In the meantime, they made their point and succeeded in managing information for American consumption.

The failure of the Chiang government to represent Chinese American interests was roundly denounced by Wu Xiangying, in his history of the Chinese in the United States (1954), in which he characterized the repeal as “an injury” to Chinese Americans who were given “false promises.” Like dumb persons, Chinese Americans were forced to swallow bitter pills, according to him, but were unable to complain of their bitterness. He thought the true beneficiary of the repeal was the

United States, not China or the Chinese. He blamed Song Zhiwen, minister of foreign affairs, and Wei Daoming, Chinese ambassador to the United States, for their incompetence and indifference, and ultimately, Chiang Kai-shek for appointing these officials.

It is obvious from this review that, though the Guomindang government remained inconspicuous throughout the legislative process, it, in fact, worked closely with the political elites and the Citizens' Committee: it helped draft a bill, lined up witnesses at the hearings, generated favorable public opinions, helped mobilize letter campaigns, lobbied key Congressmen to solicit their support, and finally even manufactured consent and favorable comments from government officials after the bill passed the House. This was indeed a prelude or a dress rehearsal for the sophisticated legislative engineering and public opinion management of what came to be known as the China Lobby after the war. On the other hand, why should this not be, considering there were only minor changes in the cast of characters between the Repeal Act and the bigger and better productions to be undertaken by the China Lobby after the war?

Since we have described the main characters—the China-oriented groups and the Guomindang agents in the United States—we must now turn to the minor supporting characters, the Chinese in the United States or the Chinese Americans. It seems ironic that the group that stood to benefit most from any relaxation on the repressive laws against the Chinese was systematically excluded from the legislative process. To be sure, Chinese Americans were not totally kept out, but they were permitted only to play a very limited



and prescribed role assigned to them by the Citizens' Committee. That role, as it turned out, was to demonstrate to the House Immigration Committee that Chinese in America were no longer the coolies, the heathens, and the immoral, unassimilable human beings of the past. Instead, they were fully Americanized and assimilated, posing no threat to the moral and racial purity of the United States.

To orchestrate this narrow stereotypical image of Chinese Americans, the committee carefully lined up two Chinese Americans, Dr. Li Min Hin from Hawaii and Paul Yee, an electronic engineer working for the War Department at that time, two successful, non-threatening and fully assimilated Chinese Americans. Dr. Li told the committee that he was an American citizen, had received his education and medical degree in the United States, was past Commander of the Hawaiian Department of the American Legion which has a largely Caucasian membership and had represented his department at different national conventions of the Legion as chairman of his delegation. His testimony dealt mostly with the positive role of the Chinese in Hawaii, highlighting the important contributions they had made to the advancement of the Hawaiian Islands and the responsibilities they had assumed in connection with the prosecution of the war effort. He said, "Hawaii furnishes the best example of the United States of the assimilability of the Chinese into the American way of life."

The other Chinese American witness, Paul Yee, told the committee about the part played by many skilled Chinese technicians and experts in various war industries and in the

Armed Services, obviously an attempt to demonstrate that the Chinese could and did assimilate to American life and could no longer be considered "coolie laborers." When asked about the potential passage of a repeal law, he answered that, "It would certainly increase the friendship between the Chinese, the American Chinese, and this country." He did not answer the question in light of the gross injustice built into the proposed legislation. Either he did not know the impact of the proposed bills on the Chinese American community or he was not at liberty extensively on both the positive and negative aspects of it.

If the objective of the Citizens' Committee was to put forth before the American public an image of successful, patriotic, hardworking, docile, assimilated Chinese, it very definitely achieved that end. In many ways, this was precisely the same image that Rose Hum Lee tried to project to the American public in her 1942 article published in *Survey Graphic*. She wanted the American society to know that Chinese Americans were productive and loyal members of the American society and were well on their way to what she called complete assimilation. The only barrier toward achieving that goal for Chinese Americans was the second-class status that Chinese were placed in and her prescription for elevating Chinese status was in fact the removal of the discriminatory Exclusion laws and rendering in the United States eligible for citizenship. Dr. Li Min Hin and Paul Yee both projected the same assimilated image that Rose Hum Lee tried to project to the American public. No doubt, the depiction that Rose Hum Lee, Dr. Li, and Paul Yee put forth before the American public was one of a successful assimilated Chinese. Whether or not this



image was consistent with the social reality facing the Chinese in the United States, it became an image to be put in practice and a lifestyle to be emulated by all Chinese Americans in the decades after the war.

However, on the negative side, the new law had very little effect on the Chinese community because of the war and the small quota allocated to the Chinese. Most Chinese had to continue living separated from their wives, husbands, parents, or close relatives. Moreover, the naturalization right, while it was there, did not necessarily mean that Chinese in the United States were automatically awarded citizenship. To acquire citizenship one had to pass three tests: the valid documentation of entry into the United States, ability to pass the English language test, and knowledge of American history and the Constitution. All three tests proved to be difficult, if not insurmountable, for most Chinese in the United States. In 1943, the year before the new law went into effect, the total number of persons naturalized was 497, a figure that included whites born in China. The figures for the next four years, 1944-1947, were 730, 739, 599, and 831. The repeal did nothing to empower the Chinese American community. To this date, Chinese Americans remain largely disenfranchised.

Lastly, the repeal and the granting of the quota and naturalization right to the Chinese resulted in the emergence of a new image of the Chinese in America—an image that depicts Chinese as assimilated into the mainstream, or an image which many Chinese, including people like Rose Hum Lee, Dr. Li Min Hing, Paul Yee, and others, began to convince themselves was the only appropriate

or acceptable image to be cultivated and internalized, regardless of their class status and racial, cultural, and linguistic affiliation. This wartime image of being equal to whites and being accepted into the dominant society soon turned into a self-fulfilling prophecy that proved to be self-deceiving and detrimental. The sole enduring stereotypical image of Chinese Americans was that they were docile, hardworking, and successfully assimilated—an image that was clearly false.

CONCLUSIONS

The repeal of the Chinese Exclusion laws in 1943 did little to liberate Chinese Americans from racial oppression and extraterritorial domination of the Chiang regime. In fact, the repeal itself and the deliberate exclusion of Chinese Americans from the legislative process reinforced the structure of dual domination. Both the Chiang regime and the interest groups behind the repeal learned important lessons in political lobbying. Their organizational network became the basis for the emergence of the powerful China Lobby after the war.

In the meantime, Chinese Americans had to wait for the African American civil rights movement to lead the way toward their own liberation, not only from racial oppression but also the extraterritorial domination which intensified greatly during the Cold War. The civil rights movements paved the way for the 1965 comprehensive immigration law that finally abolished the racist quota law and strengthened the Chinese Americans in their struggle against racial oppression. In their own struggle for liberation from racial oppression, Chinese Americans discovered



how they also needed to be liberated from the extraterritorial domination of Taiwan and China if they were to achieve full citizenship in the United States.

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